

Message Text

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12

ACTION EUR-12

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FM AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8326

INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMCONSUL BELFAST

AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

C O N F I D E N T I A L DUBLIN 1822

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, UK, EI

SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS FINDINGS AGAINST BRITIAN

REF: DUBLIN 1731

1. THE RELEASE OF THE REPORT OF THE EUROPEAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION HAS CAUSED QUITE A PUBLIC STIR HERE. THE ANNOYED REACTION IS NOT SO MUCH FROM THE RELEASE OF THE REPORT ITSELF, WHICH WAS LEAKED AND WIDELY REPORTED BEFORE (DUBLIN 1731), BUT AGAINST BRITISH NORTHERN IRELAND SECRETARY REES' BROADSIDE AGAINST THE IRISH FOR PRESSING THE CASE. ACCORDING TO THE PAPERS HERE REES SAID THE AFFAIR COULD HAVE BEEN SETTLED LONG AGO AND CRITICIZED THE IRISH GOVERNMENT FOR RAKING OVER OLD COALS. THE IRISH ARE ALSO UPSET ABOUT AN UNNAMED HIGH OFFICIAL FROM WHITEHALL WHO ALLEGED THAT THE BRITISH HAD ENOUGH EVIDENCE ON IRISH MISTREATMENT OF BRITISH CITIZENS IN IRISH PRISONS TO BRING THE GOI TO STRASBOURG IF THEY CHOSE TO DO SO.

2. THE IRISH GOVERNMENT, FOR ITS PART, HAS SO FAR DELIBERATELY ATTEMPTED TO DOWNPLAY ANY FRICTION AND HAS NOT PUBLICLY REACTED TO REES' COMMENTS. ATTORNEY GENERAL
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COSTELLO STRESSED IN AN INTERVIEW THAT THE DECISION TO

PRESS THE CASE HAS NOT AFFECTED THE FRIENDLY RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES, AND MADE IT CLEAR THAT "TERRORISTS CANNOT GAIN ANY SATISFACTION FROM THE REPORT." THE GOI ORIGINALLY INTENDED TO EXPRESS REGRET THAT IT HAD BEEN NECESSARY TO PROSECUTE THE CASE, AT LEAST ACCORDING TO REPORTERS WHO SAW A DRAFT PRESS RELEASE. AFTER REES' BLAST THE EXPRESSION OF REGRET WAS DELETED FROM THE PRESS RELEASE.

3. THE IRISH ARE PUZZLED AND ANNOYED ALSO THAT ONLY ONE LONDON PAPER, THE SUN, HAD THE "DECENCY", AS ONE PHRASED IT, TO OWN UP TO THE FACT THAT BRITISH OFFICIALS ACTUALLY DID SYSTEMATICALLY AND BY POLICY "TORTURE" PRISONERS. APPARENTLY MOST OF THE LONDON PAPERS CASTIGATED THE IRISH FOR BRINGING UP THE MATTER, AND ACCUSED COSGROVE OF PLAYING POLITICS. THE IRISH ARE FINDING IT HARD TO UNDERSTAND HOW THEY COULD BE IN THE DOCK WHEN HMG HAS JUST BEEN FOUND "INDICTED" OF A VERY SERIOUS OFFENSE.

4. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH THE STRASBOURG REPORT APPARENTLY INDICATES THAT MEETINGS WERE HELD BETWEEN THE BRITISH AND IRISH IN 1973 AND 1974 TO ATTEMPT A "FRIENDLY SETTLEMENT," ACCORDING TO FOREIGN MINISTER FITZGERALD THE BRITISH MADE ONLY ONE PROPOSAL ON BOTH OCCASIONS, I.E. THE IRISH SHOULD DROP THE CASE. FITZGERALD, IN CONFIDENCE, TOLD US A YEAR AGO THAT IF THE BRITISH OFFERED "ANYTHING, ANYTHING AT ALL, WE WOULD DROP THE CASE." THE BRITISH HE SAID, "WERE GUILTY, KNEW THEY WERE GUILTY, AND SHOULD HAVE ADMITTED THEIR GUILT. THEY ALSO SHOULD HAVE PROMISED NOT TO INDULGE IN SUCH PRACTICES IN THE FUTURE." HE SAID THAT WITHOUT SOME GESTURE ON THE PART OF THE BRITISH IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE FOR THE IRISH TO DROP THE CASE, AND ANYONE WHO HAD THE SLIGHTEST KNOWLEDGE OF THE FEELINGS OF THE MINORITY COMMUNITY IN THE NORTH WOULD KNOW WHY IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE FOR THE IRISH TO ABANDON THE CASE. INTERNMENT AND TORTURE HAD COME TO BE SYMBOLS OF FIFTY YEARS OF OPPRESSION. FITZGERALD SAID IT WAS NONSENSE THAT THE PROSECUTION OF THE CASE GAVE AID AND COMFORT TO THE IRA. HE ADDED IT WOULD BE RATHER DIFFICULT FOR ANYONE TO TAKE THE VIEW THAT THE GOI IS SOFT ON THE IRA.

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5. THIS BIT OF IRRITATION WILL UNDOUBTEDLY GO AWAY QUICKLY, AS RELATIONS ARE REALLY QUITE GOOD BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES AND THIS IS BASICALLY A MINOR AFFAIR. HOWEVER, IT DOES ILLUSTRATE THE ATAVISTIC AND AMBIGUOUS NATURE OF THE ANGLO/IRISH RELATIONSHIP. ONE DOES NOT HAVE TO SCRATCH VERY DEEP TO BRING FORTH BITTERNESS, IRRITATION, DISTRUST AND BASIC MISUNDERSTANDING. IT IS TO THE CREDIT OF THE TWO GOVERNMENTS THAT THEY HAVE BEEN ABLE MOSTLY

TO OVERCOME THESE FEELINGS AND ESTABLISH A CLOSE AND
WORKING RELATIONSHIP.
CURLEY

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